

Working Toward Solutions

Marine debris pollution can only truly be managed through prevention – changing the behaviors that cause marine debris to enter the environment.

Consequently, multiple organizations and local, regional and state agencies are collaborating on outreach projects designed to bring awareness to and alleviate the problem of marine debris. Several efforts are focusing on monitoring the behaviors and activities that result in marine debris and developing prevention strategies that educate people on marine debris issues, their role in the problem and how to

prevent it. For more information on programs that are working to foster change, visit www.marinedebris.noaa.gov.

What You Can Do

Here are some steps that you can take to help keep oceans and waterways free of debris:

- Reduce, reuse, recycle. Choose reusable items and use fewer disposable ones.
- Retain all pieces of fishing line, net or other litter for proper disposal in trash containers.
- Keep streets, sidewalks, parking lots and storm drains free of trash – they empty into our oceans.
- At the beach, park or playground, dispose of all trash in the proper receptacles or take your trash home with you. Pick up any debris you see while out.
- Serve as an example to others. Get involved in cleanups in your area and encourage others to help keep the beaches and oceans clean.



LAND-BASED SOURCES OF MARINE DEBRIS



How People Can
**Prevent Marine Debris
While On Land**



What Is Marine Debris?

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration defines marine debris as any man-made object discarded, disposed of or abandoned that enters the coastal or marine environment.

Where Does It Come From?

All types of marine debris can be traced to one source – people. People's mishandling of waste materials and a host of other items is the primary cause of the marine debris problem. Researchers traditionally classify marine debris as coming from **land-** or **ocean/waterway-based** sources. A majority of marine debris comes from land-based sources.

Land-based debris can reach the oceans through:

- Inappropriate disposal of trash from many land-based activities, including

picnicking, beachgoing, fishing and water-side sporting events;

- Debris items from lawns, parking lots, sidewalks and streets being blown, swept or washed into storm drains, which then empty untreated into the ocean;
- Improper disposal of packaging materials;
- Inadvertent or intentional release of waste from shore-based solid waste disposal and waste processing facilities; and
- Sewage overflows.

Impacts of Marine Debris

Marine debris poses real threats to ocean ecosystems, wildlife and human health and safety.

Effects on ocean ecosystems

- Debris can pollute and clog watersheds, adversely affecting water quality and habitat.
- Abandoned nets, plastic tarps, fishing gear and other debris can smother and crush sensitive ecosystems.



Effects on marine wildlife

- Discarded fishing line, nets, rope and other debris can entangle, maim and even drown many wildlife species. Animals can also ingest debris that resembles food, which can lead to starvation and/or choking.



Effects on people

- Medical and personal hygiene debris can enter waterways when sewer systems fail or overflow. These items often contain harmful bacteria and pathogens.
- Syringes, broken glass and other hazardous items pose obvious dangers to bare-footed beachgoers.
- Grocery and trash bags, fishing line and other debris can wrap around boat propellers and clog seawater intakes, causing costly damage and becoming a safety hazard.